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By CELIA ZITRON

## Culture at the summit

It was interesting to observe President Nixon's adroit combination of politics and culture as he recited a poem by Mao Tse-tung at the Feb. 21 banquet in his honor in Peking. That display of the President's hitherto undisclosed love of poetry recalled another high-level political-literary event—this time at the White House on Jan. 28.

On that occasion the President presented the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian decoration, to Mr. and Mrs. DeWitt Wallace, founders of the Reader's Digest. For fifty years, the Reader's Digest has spread right-wing propaganda among its many readers (now 18 million in this country and 12 million in 25 countries abroad).

Targets of its political articles, whether condensations of material from other publications or original Digest material, are trade unions, welfare, activist students, peace demonstrators, or anything even slightly to the left of center. It is an ardent supporter of Nixon and of the war in Indochina. It also includes literary gems like "How Wives Drive Husbands Crazy," "Eight Steps to a New Life," "I Am Joe's Prostate."

In making the presentation, President Nixon noted that Mr. Wallace "has made a towering contribution to that freedom of the mind from which spring all our other liberties." The citation described the Digest as a "monthly university in print, teaching 100 million readers world-wide the wonder of common life and the scope of man's potential."

The 100 guests are described in *The Nation* of Feb. 14 as "almost all the luminaries of right-wing America." Members of the Cabinet were there, including Attorney-General John N. Mitchell, that promoter of the "freedom of the mind" through universal wire-tapping and mass arrests of anti-war demonstrators.

But literature and philosophy were not overlooked. Sidney Hook, emeritus New York University professor of philosophy was there. His contributions to the "freedom of the mind" are numerous. During cold-war McCarthyite witch hunts, he provided the theoretical basis for investigations and dismissals of alleged Communist

teachers and professors. He received public notice again in Sept. 1970, when President Nixon described a Hook article as "among the most cogent and compelling documents I have ever read on campus violence. In press reports of Nixon's high praise Hook was quoted as describing as "noisome hogwash" contentions that there is a threat to academic freedom from outside the university." It was the students, he said, who were the destroyers of academic freedom by substituting the "political goals of action" for the "academic goals of learning."

Most recently, he has been crying out against small attempts by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to rectify job discrimination against Blacks in colleges and universities. In an article "Discrimination against the Qualified," (*N.Y. Times*, Nov. 5) he accused HEW of engaging in racism, and seeking to compel the hiring of unqualified Blacks over qualified whites.

Another literary luminary at the affair was Irving Kristol, who gained notoriety in the late 1950's when *Encounter* magazine (and its sponsor the Congress for Cultural Freedom) of which he was co-editor with Stephen Spender, was exposed as a CIA operation. Asked whether he had investigated earlier rumors of CIA support, he replied that he had not considered them "particularly credible" because they came from "left-wing or anti-American" sources. It goes without saying that he prides himself on remaining a "cold warrior."

However, there was a fine cultural contribution at the affair—from a most unexpected source. Carole Feraci, part of the Ray Coniff Singers, a perfectly safe ensemble, described by the President as "square," pulled out a placard which read "Stop the Killing." And she read into the microphone a statement in simple words—prose poem, though not conceived as such. She said:

"Mr. President, stop bombing human beings, animals and vegetation.

"You go to church on Sunday. If Jesus Christ was in this room tonight you would not dare to drop another bomb.

"Bless the Berrigans and Daniel Ellsberg."

To say that this beautiful expression of humanity was not appreciated by the audience is an understatement.

The musical group's leader, Ray Coniff, ordered her off the stage and apologized to the President. Herbert Klein and two Secret Service men stood by as she was questioned by the press. Asked whether she "blessed the Berrigans for the bombing they planned," she replied: "No, for the draft cards they burned. I bless them for what they believe in. I don't believe in bombing, but if that's what it takes..."

At this point, she was hustled off, searched for weapons, and escorted out of the White House.

After the President and Mrs. Nixon had left the party, the *Nation* reports, some of the distinguished guests expressed their feelings. Secretary of State William P. Rogers said, "I'm sure she's just a mixed up kid." Told that she is 30 years old, he said, "Well, you don't necessarily get wisdom at that age."

Mrs. Martha Mitchell, wife of the Attorney-General made a characteristic contribution. "I think she (Carole) should be turn limb from limb," she yelled.

But millions of readers of press reports of the event rejoiced. Not even the Reader's Digest with its great resources and its vast circulation can stamp out condemnation of the atrocious war in Indochina. Carole Feraci had spoken for them. She had shown that "the scope of man's potential" cannot be contained by the Wallaces, or for that matter, by the Nixons.

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